

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, June 7, 2017, to meet the Friends of Greenbelt Theatre.

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 7:35 p.m. The meeting was held in Room 201 of the Greenbelt Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Nicole Ard, City Manager; Brian Kim, Assistant Director of Public Works, and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Administrative Assistant.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Caitlin McGrath, Friends of Greenbelt Theatre; Diane Oberg, Greenbelt News Review; and Bill Orleans.

Dr. McGrath stated that the Friends of Greenbelt Theatre (FOGT) began managing the theater a little over two years ago. She provided Council a summary of the last two years and an outline of plans going forward.

Dr. McGrath reported that in 2016 the theatre ran 190 films in 52 weeks and 53 of them were first-run films. She said membership and over all ticket sales have increased. Dr. McGrath said the theatre works with the City's Recreation Department with the summer camp and schools out programs. She said a screenings of the Grinch was featured during the Festival of Lights events. Other events at the theatre included: Prince George's County Public School's 4th and 5th graders viewed Hidden Figures and a NASA employee came out and spoken with the students; the Student Film Festival; Prince George's Memorial Library System story times on the screen twice a month, Ava Duvernay's documentary, 13th; the presidential debates, presidential elections and the Comey hearing.

Dr. McGrath said some of the challenges the theatre faced were legal bills, back billing with Pepco, vagaries of Hollywood billing system and payroll. The save-me-a-seat campaign was forced to be put on the back burner. She said areas for potential growth are with the non-taxed revenue streams: such as fundraisers, donations, memberships, sponsorships, advertising and rentals.

Ms. Davis stated the free shows are more popular but do not cover the cost. Dr. McGrath answered the free events have a higher attendance with higher concessions sales which in turn is good business. She said there is a 10 % tax on each ticket sold.

Mr. Roberts asked if there was a way to track, how many people who attend the free events are from Greenbelt and how many come back. Dr. McGrath said there wasn't any way that could be tracked. Ms. Davis suggested that a second clipboard designed to capture people's email addresses be placed in the lobby. Dr. McGrath stated she would consider this and that board members are in the lobby to talk with the citizen and gather additional data.

Dr. McGrath answered a question that Ms. Davis asked about advertising on screen. She stated there haven't been any complaints just yet. Greenbelt events are advertised for free and there are no political ads.

Ms. Pope inquired why certain movies aren't being played at the theatre. Dr. McGrath stated it all depends on what's playing at the Beltway Plaza Theater. Mayor Jordan asked did Dr. McGrath make the movie sections. Dr. McGrath advised it is more than just make a selection. She talks with the brokers, the board, makes spreadsheets, and collects the data on certain movies and makes negotiations on Monday and Tuesday for a movie to get played on that Friday.

In response to a question from Mayor Jordan and Ms. Pope, Dr. McGrath explained the process of selecting movies to be shown in the theatre. She noted that discussions are held with the FOGT Board, brokers, etc. She said consideration is given to selections being shown at Beltway Plaza Theatres

Council and Mr. Kim discussed the leak in the theatre roof and the recommendation to address the problem. Dr. McGrath stated she was very happy with Public Works for fixing the leak in the lobby and other maintenance issues that have come up.

There was discussion about the financial issues with the theatre. Dr. McGrath said it is taken longer than anticipated to become financially sound. She thanked the city for the recent grant to the theatre. Ms. Ard mentioned she had recently held meetings with Jeff Williams, City Treasurer, and Dr. McGrath to discuss the theatres business model as well as the possibility of Dr. McGrath becoming an employee of the City. It was noted that negotiations for the new theatre contract will begin in December. Mr. Putens stated that the utility bills for the theatre should be put back in the city's name.

Mr. Orleans asked and was provided answers to several questions

Informational Items:

Several informational items were discussed.

The meeting ended at 10:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Shaniya Lashley-Mullen
Administrative Assistant*